

Advising Graduate Students Doing Community-Engaged Dissertation Research: The Advisor-Advisee Relationship

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Abstract

A critical dimension in the development of emerging community-engaged scholars is the advisor-advisee relationship during the student's doctoral degree program. A qualitative study of four doctoral students interested in doing community-engaged dissertation research, and their advisors, identified five characteristics of such relationships: (1) background and experience matter; (2) faculty advisors and advisees are co-learners; (3) the advisor-advisee relationship can approach a synergistic state; (4) faculty advisors often serve as interpreters and interveners; and (5) community-engaged dissertation studies often lack "structural" support. The findings suggest two practical steps for faculty advisors to take when mentoring doctoral students who are doing community-engaged dissertation studies: (1) be sensitive to, and learn from, the community experience of one's advisees, and (2) intentionally model mutuality and reciprocity.

Introduction

Faculty members are being called on to reframe their conventional understanding of teaching, research, and service in the academy to include the "scholarship of engagement"—to become "engaged scholars" who practice "community engagement" (Boyer 1990, 1996). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2008) defines community engagement as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities . . . for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." Engaged scholarship is often framed within Stokes's (1997) "Pasteur's Quadrant": that is, doing use-inspired research, in collaboration with community partners, that builds on basic research while improving practice.

Though the expansive nature of community-engaged work is evident on campuses across the country, many disciplines still do not endorse or conduct community-engaged scholarship. This lack of involvement in the face of increasing recognition of community-engaged scholarship in higher education provides a faculty development opportunity, especially in preparing future faculty

members during their graduate education (*Applegate, 2002; Bloomfield, 2006; O'Meara & Jaeger, 2007*). While students are coming to graduate programs with both interest and experience in community-engaged work, there are few opportunities intentionally included in graduate programs to develop the knowledge, skills, and orientation needed for such work (*O'Meara & Jaeger, 2007*).

Historically, graduate education prepares students for their role as researchers (*Braxton, Luckey, & Helland, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001*). Doctoral students, most often trained at research universities, are encouraged to narrowly focus their research interests and to develop specialized skills (*O'Meara & Jaeger, 2007*). Doctoral students typically graduate with a limited understanding of, or limited experience with, the diversity of roles faculty members play, particularly in the area of community engagement (*Austin, 2002*).

The authors posit that faculty advisors of doctoral students often misunderstand or misrepresent community-engaged scholarship. As a result, they may suggest that their advisees postpone community-engaged work until their dissertations are complete or even until they have secured tenure. Such messages can dissuade graduate students from seriously considering community-engaged academic careers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between doctoral students who are doing community-engaged dissertation studies and their faculty advisors. Specifically, the authors examined how an advisor's perception of engaged scholarship shapes and influences the scholarship and practice of an advisee. The study also explored factors (e.g., resources, coursework, and personal and career goals) that influence the scholarship and practice of doctoral students who are doing community-engaged dissertation studies.

Literature Review

The authors looked to the literature on advisor-advisee relationships, mentoring, and university-community relationships to ground their study.

The Advisor-Advisee Relationship

Among the factors that influence graduate student academic development and learning experiences (e.g., collegiality and curriculum), research has consistently shown that advising is one of

the most significant variables associated with academic success (Anderson, Oju, & Falkner, 2001;

Boyle & Boice, 1998; Golde, 1998;

Haworth & Bair, 2000; Malaney,

1988; Schlosser & Gelsو, 2005).

Golde (1998) interviewed 58 doctoral dropouts (students who did not complete their degree programs), and found that one underlying factor of dropout behavior was difficult relationships with faculty advisors. Haworth and Bair (2000) identified five learning and teaching practices that contribute significantly to graduate student intellectual development. One of the five practices was individualized mentoring. Advisee mentoring was found

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to be a positive predictor of research productivity and self-efficacy for doctoral students (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006). Despite the significance of advising in graduate education, "graduate students do not receive focused, regular feedback or mentoring" (Austin, 2002, p. 113). Advising and mentoring are critical to what Gardner (2009) calls "a journey toward independence" (p. 70). Gardner adds that as students begin a new phase in their doctoral program,

They experience both the transition to this phase as well as a great deal of ambiguity regarding the expectations for this phase of their development. The ambiguity then feeds into the need for self-direction, to compensate for this ambiguity during the transition. Support, however, can mitigate some of the negative experiences within this experience. This is to say, faculty and administrative support may alleviate some of the ambiguity through clear expectations and guidelines (p. 76).

In short, faculty advisors play an important role in advising students through doctoral work, yet limited research addresses the advisor-advisee relationship (Paglis et al., 2006). More commonly discussed is the role of mentoring.

Mentoring

The value of mentoring continues to gain recognition, and is widely accepted in the literature as well as in practice (Cohen, 1993). Crisp and Cruz (2009) note that mentoring has become a national

priority, as demonstrated by hundreds of formalized programs and practices that include mentoring components. Though the mentoring literature is more extensive than research on advisor-advisee relationships, Crisp and Cruz in their review of mentoring literature suggest that research on mentoring is largely atheoretical, and that limited progress has been made in implementing a consistent definition of mentoring. More than 50 definitions of mentoring were identified in Crisp and Cruz's review. According to Jacobi (1991) and Crisp and Cruz (2009), commonalities among some of these definitions include characteristics such as (1) a focus on growth and accomplishment of an individual; (2) provision of broad forms of support (e.g., professional and career development assistance, role modeling, and psychological support); (3) relationships that are both personal and reciprocal; and (4) relationships that may be informal or formal, long- or short-term, planned or spontaneous.

The authors of this study feel that having a "personal and reciprocal" relationship (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991) is rarely operationalized in the advisor-advisee mentoring relationship. A mentoring relationship that is reciprocal implies that the relationship is complementary, matched, or perhaps equivalent. The authors contend that few characteristics of a typical faculty advisor-doctoral student advisee relationship are reciprocal. Rather, the authors perceive that a traditional relationship is more hierarchical—the faculty expert and the apprentice advisee. In Roberts's (2000) comprehensive exploration of two decades of research on mentoring, he discussed mentoring "as a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person's career and personal development" (p. 162). This description does not support the idea of a complementary or equivalent relationship. Blackwell (1989), another scholar who has studied mentoring, suggested an even more hierarchical description of mentoring as "a process by which persons of a superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégé" (p. 9). Again, this definition does not suggest a relationship based on reciprocity.

In Crisp and Cruz's (2009) review of literature between 1990 and 2007, they suggest four latent constructs that are present in a mentoring relationship but are difficult to measure: (1) psychological and emotional support (e.g., listening, providing moral support, identifying problems, providing encouragement); (2) support

for setting goals and choosing a career path (e.g., review and exploration of interests, abilities, ideas, and beliefs; stimulation of critical thinking; reflection; the offering of suggestions; the challenging of perspectives); (3) academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing the mentee's disciplinary knowledge (e.g., helping the mentee acquire necessary skills and knowledge; educating, evaluating, and challenging the mentee; establishing a teaching-learning process; intervening on behalf of the mentee; providing visibility; taking blame and shielding from negative publicity; supporting the mentee's dream); and (4) support as a role model (e.g., the mentee learns from the mentor's present and past actions; the mentee observes the mentor as a leader). Although the authors believe this conceptual definition is both comprehensive and helpful in understanding advisor-advisee relationships, they feel it lacks the critical component of reciprocity. In short, the literature presented above describes only part of the relationship that exists between advisors and advisees. To address the missing dimension of reciprocity, the authors turned to the literature that examines community engagement related to community partners.

University-Community Relationships

To understand university-community relationships, the authors drew on the work of Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009), who suggest that university-community relationships reflect a continuum, from awareness of the relationship on one end to shared and synergistic goals on the other. University-community relationships are based on equity, mutuality, and trust. University-community partners (community members, faculty members, staff, and students) work collaboratively to address issues and concerns as co-learners, co-educators, and co-generators of knowledge (*Gelmon, Holland, Seifer, Shinnamom, & Connors, 1998*). When conceptualized in these "co" roles, not only are faculty members understood as in some way analogous to students (as learners), but they are performing work that involves, perhaps even requires, learning from and with those who have traditionally been cast as the recipients of faculty expertise (*Jameson, Clayton, & Jaeger, 2011*). These "co" roles are counter-normative and require a perspective shift (*Clayton & Ash, 2004*) away from traditional faculty advisor-advisee relationships that often involve power dynamics and hierarchy.

Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) suggest a democratic approach to partnerships that integrates the knowledge and expertise of faculty members, community members, and students, thus

offering a voice for all partners in the identification of questions or problems as well as solutions (*Jameson et al., 2011*).

The norms of democratic culture are determined by the values of inclusiveness participation, task sharing, lay participation, reciprocity in public problem solving, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building (*Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 6*).

The authors believe that supplementing the constructs of mentoring as defined by Crisp and Cruz (2009) with concepts related to university-community relationships offers the opportunity to more fully understand advisor-advisee relationships for graduate students doing university-community-engaged scholarship.

Method

An interpretive qualitative research design (*Maxwell, 2005*) was selected for this study to allow for deeper examination and understanding of the ways that faculty advisors and their doctoral advisees learn about, and practice, community-engaged scholarship. A multicase study (*Yin, 2001*) was used to compare patterns of engagement knowing, and activities (1) of the individuals, and (2) of the advisor-advisee pairs. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to data collection.

Background on the Study Participants

Purposeful sampling (*Patton, 2002*) was used for this study. Four pairs of doctoral graduate students and their faculty advisors who were participants in the Houle Engaged Scholars Program, an 18-month program to train engaged scholars (*Sandmann & Jaeger, 2008*), constituted the sample. Selection criteria for the Houle Engaged Scholars Program (*Miles & Huberman, 1994*) included (1) interest in community-based, community-collaborative scholarship, and (2) commitment by the graduate student to an engaged scholarship dissertation. Each advisor-advisee pair was from one of three large research-extensive universities that intentionally support scholarly university-community engagement endeavors. The four advisor-advisee pairs came from diverse disciplines—adult education, communications, public administration, and public health.

Data Collection

The authors conducted individual one-hour semistructured interviews with each of the four advisees and three of the faculty advisors. Six interviews were conducted in person; one was conducted by phone. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition to the interviews, the four pairs gathered for a videotaped two-day workshop in January 2009. Notes of the workshop conversations were transcribed. A virtual meeting of the four pairs was held in August 2009 via Elluminate, an online learning platform used to create a virtual environment for synchronous interaction among the participants (see <http://www.elluminate.com>). The virtual meeting's conversation was recorded, and subsequently transcribed. Each of the four pairs met one-on-one with one of the authors for an hour twice during the 18-month period. Notes from these discussions provided additional data. Finally, four posters and one presentation, produced by the advisees for the 2009 National Outreach Scholarship Conference, were examined.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method (*Merriam, 1998*) was used to identify themes in the narrative data. The data were analyzed in two stages: first as individual cases, and then as advisor-advisee pairings. The three authors independently read the materials that constituted the case for each of the eight study participants and developed individual profiles for each of them. Composite profiles and themes were also developed for the advisor-advisee pairings. Then the authors independently, and as a group, compared profiles within and across each of the data sets. Specifically, they searched the data for regularities, patterns, and general topics. Then the authors recorded words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns and assigned codes (*Strauss & Corbin, 1998*). Finally, the authors discussed, compared, and combined their analyses (*Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002*).

Limitations of the Study

There are two limitations to this study. First, only eight participants were involved: four faculty advisors, and four doctoral students who were doing community-engaged dissertation research. Each of the graduate student participants was predisposed to work in the community. Future studies should include a larger sample with a control group of doctoral students who are not predisposed

to community-engagement scholarship, nor doing community-engaged dissertation studies.

Second, the authors were the researchers for this study. Two are faculty members who serve as faculty advisors themselves (though not for any of the four graduate students in this study); the third author is a graduate student. The authors conduct as well as study community-engaged scholarship. They were the facilitators of the Houle Engaged Scholars pilot program.

Profiles of the Participants

Profiles of the study participants are described below.

The Four Faculty Advisor Participants

All faculty members were tenured associate professors with a strong community-engagement orientation and deep commitment to mentoring graduate students, but varying levels of departmental support for their work. Overall, the advisors believed that a stronger mentor relationship is needed in advisor-advisee relationships since engagement tends to be more time-consuming than other academic work. Such scholarship may also yield different scholarly outputs, which may or may not be valued by some faculty members and disciplines.

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The advisors in this study revealed that they support students doing community-engaged dissertation studies because they feel it their responsibility to help students' success and/or because they consider it their responsibility as scholars. These feelings of responsibility are consistent with the constructs of mentoring discussed by Crisp and Cruz (2009), including psychological and emotional support, support for setting goals and choosing a career path, and serving as a role model. The four advisors exemplified Crisp and Cruz's construct of academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing students' knowledge relevant to their chosen field, which included intervening for mentees. For example, one faculty member stated:

I help [her] navigate within the university structure the practices that either enable or constrain her from accomplishing her goals. And that is, in some cases, sort of running guard for students who are doing good constructive [community-engaged] work that will take a long time because you have to develop strong relationships. Practically that means . . . many times explaining to colleagues about this work and account for a graduate student's actions or what appears to be inaction in terms of the length of time it takes to do this [community-engaged] research.

Advisors identified challenges they felt students conducting community-engaged research are faced with, such as obtaining time and funding to do their studies as well as dealing with the dynamics of relationships within the research projects themselves. Advisors acknowledged that promotion and tenure could become a challenge for these potential future faculty members, but felt that this challenge should not deter the students from doing community-engaged dissertation studies. The advisors did not consider themselves experts in community-engaged scholarship. In fact, they highlighted their lack of knowledge of community-engagement literature or resources to support community-engaged work.

The Four Graduate Student Advisees

The four doctoral students were all in or near the candidacy stage in their degree programs. The two female and two male students were between 30 and 50 years of age. They all had a predoctoral study connection with a community, and they believed community-engaged work is essential to who they are as scholars. One student noted

I believe that as an individual I am part of the community and when the community gains I gain. Additionally, community-engaged scholarship should be driven by altruism as opposed to other external motivations like recognition and rewards. It's the right thing to do.

The four advisees believed that one learns about community-engaged work by doing it and by collaborating with others. Obtaining support for the work, particularly financial support, was a challenge. Other challenges were differences in the goals and needs of the communities versus those of the universities.

The advisees also acknowledged the lack of university support or recognition for community-engaged work. Adequate time to do community-engaged scholarship was also a challenge. Advisees believed that community-engaged work requires communication skills, knowledge about communities (“honor local wisdom”), and a willingness to explore new areas by all participants in the process (faculty members, students, and community partners).

How did the students identify faculty advisors who are involved in or at least familiar with community-engaged scholarship? For the four participants in this study, it occurred variously. One student knew of the faculty member through mutual work in a nonprofit institute, continued to work with her, and eventually asked her to serve on his doctoral committee. Another student was connected in a process more typical to academe. She explained

Regarding my advisor, I got lucky in part. In my pre-application interview with the director of graduate studies, she advised me to gear my personal statement toward the questions I wanted to explore. Those questions related to community-based organizations and the role of communication in dealing with entrenched social problems. The grad studies committee matched me with Dr. X as an interim advisor because of his background in social entrepreneurship and working directly with organizations on corporate social responsibility. I kept him as my permanent advisor because he was very supportive of my research ideas, and because he was always willing to help me find scholarly resources relevant to my work even when they were outside of his specific area. Sometimes he drew on his professional network outside of the university to connect me with others in the discipline doing related work, and made a point of introducing me to them at national conferences. I think that's what most people expect of a mentor/advisor, but it's not always what they get according to some of my colleagues at other places.

The profiles of the study participants served as the foundation for the data analysis, which led to the generation of themes. The themes were subsequently categorized as characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship.

The Findings

Analysis of the data revealed five characteristics of faculty advisor-advisee relationships for doctoral students conducting community-engaged dissertation research:

1. Background and experience matter.
2. Faculty advisors and advisees are co-learners.
3. The advisor-advisee relationship can approach a synergistic state.
4. Faculty advisors often serve as interpreters and interveners.
5. Community-engaged dissertation studies often lack “structural” support.

The five characteristics are presented below with examples from the study’s data.

Background and Experience Matter

First, since the four advisees in the study had significant work experience, their backgrounds made them predisposed to community-engaged scholarship. Their research approach was value driven, as illustrated by their statements such as “honoring local wisdom and positionality” or acting with a sense of “altruism and a giving back to community.” They also had a penchant for working as part of a research team versus having a “secluded, silent experience.” They saw less relevance in their general graduate coursework, and more in the theory and practice of doing formal research. One advisee stated, “I chose my field because it was a highly practical problem-solving discipline. A great deal of the research is not just curiosity, it’s community-based; it’s about working with local communities, applying what we know to real problems.” Alternatively, another student developed her predisposition to community-engaged scholarship not from working directly in communities, but rather from working in a setting lacking that perspective. She put it this way.

So my background is biology. I did a lot of laboratory work making drugs in the pharmacy. . . . I was looking for more interaction with people. I had seen research carried out where they (public health practitioners) weren’t as involved in the process. The researchers identified the problem, come in and tell them how to

handle it. So, yes, I came in on the end of wanting to be part of the process and involving them and empowering them to solve their own problems.

For students in this study, life experiences had an impact on the type of dissertation research undertaken.

Faculty Advisors and Advisees are Co-learners

The data revealed that as the advisees built on their own community-based experiences, they pushed their advisors into roles as co-learners about community-engaged scholarship. Advisees worked “with” their faculty advisors rather than “for” them in the pursuit of new knowledge. “With” rather than “for” implies that the student advisees, faculty advisors, and even community members functioned as co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge. They shared responsibility, and communicated as equals (*Jameson et al., 2011*). “Mutual mentoring” is how Stanulis and Russell (2000) described a similar phenomenon they observed in a partnership study of teacher-educators, school-based educators, and student teachers. In the university context, “mutual mentoring” requires faculty members to relinquish some control over the teaching and research relationships with their doctoral advisees, thus becoming process facilitators and learners themselves (*Clayton & Ash, 2004*). A “mutual mentoring” relationship can share two characteristics of engaged scholarship—reciprocity and mutuality. The participants in this study demonstrated “mutual mentoring” relationships.

Co-learning.

The data in this investigation revealed shared responsibility for learning. Students brought to their doctoral research project knowledge of a community from working either in or with the community. The faculty advisors offered an understanding of the university and disciplinary content and research methods knowledge. Each advisor brought expertise to the table but also brought feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. One faculty advisor’s comments illuminate this observation.

It's not really traditional advising for me. I haven't had that much experience in this [community-engaged] work or trying to convince other people to do it or value it. Students have been sort of coming to me with, I want to do this, so how do I help them?

“Prescriptive advising” (*Burton & Wellington, 1998; Crookston, 1972; O’Banion, 1994*) is a term used in undergraduate education suggesting that advisors provide detailed, specific information to advisees regarding their academic programs. Advising at the doctoral level can be prescriptive at times (e.g., the faculty advisor suggests to the student what courses to take). Faculty advisor-advisee relationships in this study were not focused on the faculty advisors’ providing specific, prescribed information to their advisees. Rather, their relationships were more like journeys to build equitable relationships characterized by trust, sharing of expertise, and mutual support. Each individual in the relationship was an advocate for his or her particular perspective, but was also invested in learning more about what the other could offer. In this study, advisors shared course and program requirement information while the advisees served as information sources about community and community-engaged work for the advisors.

Negotiation is part of decision-making.

The doctoral students in this study were not seeking independence. Rather, they sought collaboration with community partners. One participant observed

Well, for me, it really is about doing the work and doing the research in the community. And with the community. And somehow I really buy the notion of students working with others as part of the learning team. You’ve got both the research piece addressing a community issue, students learning with the community, and faculty interconnected.

As the reader considers the faculty advisor-advisee relationship through the lens of co-learning, issues about control of decision-making become relevant. How does control of decision-making influence reciprocity and mutuality in the faculty advisor-advisee relationship? In this study, the responsibility was complex, fluid, and equitable. For example, one advisee who had worked in a community-based organization for more than 20 years, wanted to conduct his dissertation in that organization. While this might have been perceived as a conflict of interest by many researchers, the advisor came to appreciate the student’s unique status in bridging and interpreting the community perspective, and supported his research project.

The four faculty advisors working with doctoral advisees doing community-engagement research shared decision-making responsibility with their advisees, and communicated more as equals. In these community-engaged research projects, a third decision-making responsibility was present—decision-making was shared with the community partners. One student reported about his research, “On some level I don’t make decisions.” The procedural and strategic decisions were being made by the community organization’s leaders. Another advisor-advisee pair had a similar experience.

They’re [the community partners] the experts in the process. We do posters or manuscripts; they eyeball them before we send them out. We actually have a few who are co-authors on two of our papers. One of those papers talks about community advisory board functions and roles.

Collaboration and shared decision-making best describe the advisor-advisee relationship in this investigation (see Figure 1). The faculty advisors brought to the relationship knowledge of the university, of the discipline, and of research methods. The doctoral advisees brought work experience in or with community sites, organizations, or members.

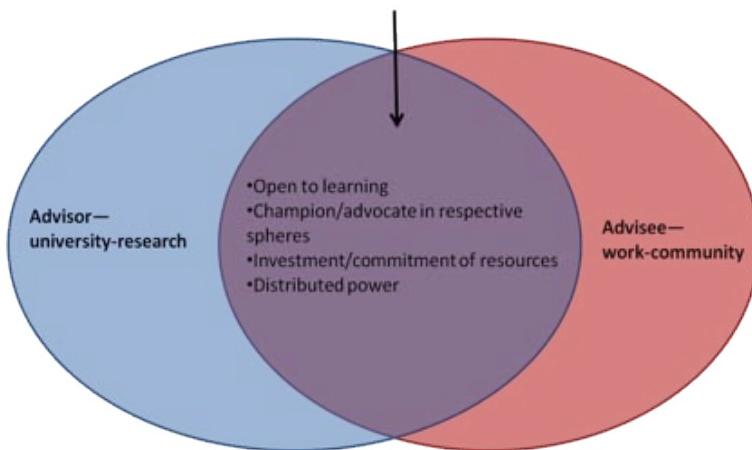


Figure 1. The Engaged Scholar Advisor-Advisee Relationship

The Advisor-Advisee Relationship Can Approach a Synergistic State

The third characteristic that emerged from the data addresses how the four advisees approached their engaged scholarly work, and how they learned from their faculty advisors. One student's comments illustrate.

[In the research project] I saw . . . how much work was put into just shared decision making and power dynamics between academia and communities. I didn't know you could do that much. There were a lot of bullet points to make this relationship great. So, I think she [the advisor] provided a very good framework on that project for us to then carry out—clinical trial study. . . . I've watched her from the day I walked in the door until the present and she, to me, epitomizes how it should be done.

There appeared to be a synergy between the advisees and their faculty advisors. The faculty advisors and advisees shared similar perspectives about community-engaged scholarship. For example, one student, consonant with his advisor, was more interested in the community than the university perspective and, thus, in understanding the challenging role of developing good relationships with the community partner. Two students, like their advisors, were concerned about connecting their community-engaged research to their disciplines. The fourth student attempted to balance the needs of the community partner with being connected to her discipline. She sought to produce information that was presented to the community in a helpful, understandable fashion and to her discipline through peer-reviewed journal articles. If the advisees and faculty advisors had not shared similar perspectives at the beginning of their relationships, the students might not have undertaken

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community-engaged research projects. This finding suggests that the faculty advisors' attitudes, beliefs, and values about the role of campus and community in community-engaged research may be incorporated in each student's approach to community-engaged work in a synergistic manner.

Faculty Advisors Often Serve as Interpreters and Interveners

The fourth characteristic suggests that for doctoral advisees doing community-engaged dissertation studies, faculty advisors often serve as sponsors, advocates, mediators, and interpreters for their advisees to other departmental faculty members. For example, faculty advisors can explain the "fit" between the students' disciplinary homes and their community-engaged research projects. They can explain the nature of engaged scholarship, particularly the pacing of students working with communities. They can advocate for support for students' work in terms of funding and acceptance of community-engaged scholarship within the department, college, and university. The theoretical model of mentoring (*Crisp & Cruz, 2009*), presented in the literature review, describes the mentor role of "intervener." This role appears to be heightened for the faculty advisor of a student doing a community-engaged dissertation study. The four advisees in this study noted the challenges they faced doing a community-engaged dissertation. One commented:

I have had faculty tell me, I purposefully don't characterize my work this way [as community-engaged] because it's not valued in my discipline or my department, and it would be compromising to my potential for promotion and tenure and reward chances. Every faculty member I talk to, even people who are doing community-engaged research, said they would discourage junior faculty from doing that kind of work if they weren't already doing it.

For the participants in this study, a faculty advisor's responsibilities were even greater when simultaneously challenging the department about what is acceptable scholarship, and advocating for the student. For example, one of the advisors said, "Because [my advisee] is doing something that is not consistent with the discipline, it's being like the liaison, a mediator; I help him make sure that his committee is going to accept that what he's doing is rigorous and solid."

Community-Engaged Dissertation Studies Often Lack “Structural” Support

The fifth characteristic emerging from the data relates to “structural” support (e.g., funding, courses, and professional development) for community-engaged research. This shortage was acknowledged by each of the four advisor-advisee pairs. For example, the faculty advisors and the advisees described a lack of departmental, institutional, and external funding for community-engaged research. The four advisees reported that their coursework did not adequately prepare them for the challenges of undertaking community-engaged research. Both the faculty advisors and the advisees reported the absence of campus-supported development opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to do community-engaged scholarship.

Implications of the Findings

The findings from this study illuminate the nature of the faculty advisor-advisee relationship for doctoral students doing community-engaged dissertation studies. The advisees’ perceptions of community-engaged research were highly influenced by the research methods and perspectives and philosophical beliefs of their faculty advisors. Thus, the authors suggest that more attention be given to supporting faculty advisor-advisee relationships for doctoral students interested in doing community-engaged dissertation research.

Attention to the advisor-advisee relationship raises practical implementation questions, such as: How do advisors learn about community-engaged scholarship? How much do they have to know about it to be supportive? Are more systematic “matching” systems desirable to link graduate students and advisors who are involved in community-engaged scholarship?

Future research should explore how the mentoring relationship incorporates co-learning, mutuality, and equity. Future research should also examine how the process of renegotiating the traditional advisor-advisee relationship occurs. Moreover, a better theoretical grounding is needed to frame the more fluid, co-learning advisor-advisee relationships for students doing community-engaged dissertation research.

Future research should also address such questions as, How does a community-engaged research dissertation affect a graduate student’s “time to degree”? How does the socialization of community-engaged advisees occur? How might the students change over

time as they develop their professional identities and seek faculty jobs? In addition, what are the effects on advisors? How might an advisor's research agenda change through co-learning and research with advisees?

Conclusion

The findings from this investigation lead to two practical suggestions for the reader: (1) help faculty advisors to be sensitive to and learn from the community experience of their advisees, and (2) encourage faculty advisors to intentionally model mutuality and reciprocity.

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